Mr. Longfellow
From the First Society at Standish

MR. PEABODY'S

SERMON

AT

THE ORDINATION

AT

STANDISH, ME.

JAN. 14, 1835.

No 1 - The Atonement. (A. P. Peabody 1835
ordination of A. A. Wheeler)

" 2 Christian Union -
installation of N. S. Johnson " 1840

" 3 The Coming of Christ
before the Berkshire Mins. Ass. " 1841

No. 4 The Will and the Affections.
Ordination of R. Peck " 1843

No. 5 The triumphs of divine
grace day, April 13. 1847 " 1847

No. 6. The Work of the Ministry
Meadville Dw. School " 1850

No. 7 Address. 33rd anniv. of Sunk
Parish Sunday School Portsmouth " 1851

No. 8. Forgiveness Sermon ordination
of Horatio Stebbins Nov 5 1851 " 1851

No. 9 "The Word of God is not bound"
Portsmouth June 4. 1854 1854

No. 10 Free Agency and Moral inability
reconciled. Ord. Rev Chas. Lowe. Sept 27 1855 " 1855

THE ATONEMENT.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE ORDINATION OF

REV. AMOS D. WHEELER,

OVER THE

FIRST CHURCH AND PARISH

AT

STANDISH, MAINE,

JAN. 14, 1835.

BY ANDREW P. PEABODY,
Pastor of the South Church and Society, Portsmouth, N. H.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

LIMINGTON:
CHARLES DAVIS.....PRINTER.
1835.

DISCOURSE.

ROMANS V: 11.

WE ALSO JOY IN GOD, THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, BY WHOM WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED THE ATONEMENT.

THIS is the only instance, in which the word *atonement* occurs in the New Testament. Its meaning may be ascertained from its derivation, — *at-one-ment*, that is, the bringing those *at one* who were before at variance. To *atone* is to mediate between two parties at variance, — to attempt to bring them *at one;* and *atonement* is the *reconciliation* which the mediator effects. That *atonement* in our text signifies reconciliation will appear from the verse immediately preceding. "If, when we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God by the death of his Son; much more, being *reconciled*, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so," continues the Apostle, "but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the *atonement*," that is, the *reconciliation to God* mentioned in the preceding verse. Moreover, the Greek substantive rendered *atonement* in our text is derived from the verb rendered *reconcile* in the preceding verse.

To effect this atonement or reconciliation was the great work of Christ's life and death. To effect it is the great work left in charge to the gospel ministry, which on this account the apostle most aptly terms "the ministry of reconciliation." In discussing

the scripture doctrine of the atonement, we bring into view at once the end at which the faithful ambassador of Christ is to aim and the means which he is to employ. I trust therefore that, in my choice of a subject for this occasion, I shall meet the views and feelings, both of our brother whom we have assembled to set apart for the ministry of reconciliation, and of this Christian people, whose eternal welfare is so intimately connected with his fidelity and success in beseeching them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God.

The atonement through Christ has often been, and may most properly be denominated the most essential doctrine of the gospel. It is a doctrine too in which all Christians are agreed. But, in making this remark, it is necessary to distinguish between the *mode* and the *fact*. The fact constitutes a doctrine of infinite practical moment, and in that all Christians are agreed. The mode belongs to those hidden counsels of God, which even revelation does not permit us fully to fathom, and it is therefore the subject of much controversy. The fact of the atonement we recognize, whenever we offer our prayers to God as children to a propitious Father, whenever we trust his care and love, whenever we look forward with confidence to his heavenly home. The mode we may know or not know; we may understand it rightly or may err concerning it; yet if we only trust in the fact of the atonement, and follow it out to its practical consequences, we may be sure of reaping its benefits.

These things premised, I shall first briefly explain the fact of the atonement, I shall then attempt to give you scriptural ideas as to the mode, and shall conclude with such practical instructions as the subject may suggest with reference to the solemnities of the present occasion.

I. I am first to explain the *fact* of the atonement. The gospel atonement is a reconciliation effected by Christ between God and man. But on which part was a reconciliation needed? Not surely on God's part. We have no proof that he was ever alien-

ated from man, but every possible proof that he has always been the friend of man. God never ceased to be gracious to our race. From the very first, he has never left himself without witness among men, in that he has done them good, giving them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. Nor has he ever ceased to care for man's spiritual wants. From Adam to Jesus Christ, we can trace a series of revelations more or less perfect, each adapted to the moral and intellectual character of the age when it was given. We discern also in the history of man before the Christian era the constant forbearance of the Almighty, a slowness to anger, a waiting to be gracious, an unwillingness that any should perish. We are expressly told too in the New Testament that Christ's mission was the result of divine love. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." There was then no reconciliation needed on the part of God.

But was reconciliation needed on man's part? It was indeed. Man was alienated from God by wicked works. God's eye of love beamed upon man from the heavens; but met no returning glance of filial affection. His mercies were showered upon earth without measure and without number; but no song of praise acknowledged them. Most men had "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Even in Judea, where a stately temple bore the name of God, and a daily sacrifice was offered him, the harp of adoration was unstrung, — the incense of the heart went not forth. There were indeed a holy few, who, like Simeon and Anna, loved and served the Lord their God; but even they had low and imperfect views of his character, and felt themselves at an unapproachable distance from him. To sum up in brief the state of the world, the Gentiles knew not God; the Jews in general either forgot his commandments, or insulted him by deliberate profligacy; and the few pious men and women among them were under the bondage

of ignorance and fear. All men then needed reconciliation to God, from whom they were alienated by blindness of mind, hardness of heart and contempt of his law. All men stood in need of an atonement at the time of the Saviour's advent. Nor could the atonement have originated with themselves. They could not have pierced the mist of their own ignorance, dispelled their own fears, taken away their own sinfulness, or promised themselves pardon. They needed that something should first be done on God's part, in order that they might draw nigh to him and become reconciled to him. It was necessary therefore that the plan of atonement should originate with God, even as in human reconciliations the first overture must be made by the offended to the offending party, or by the greater to the less. Of this atonement Christ is made the means. The atonement then comes from a propitious God, through Christ, for the benefit of alienated man.

The above statement of the doctrine under consideration is not my own; but simply a developement of the meaning of those numerous passages of the apostolic writings, where the office of Christ is spoken of. Such passages are the following: "You, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." "God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ." "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Such is the *fact* of the atonement, as the scriptures represent it.

II. Let us now enquire into the *mode* of the atonement. And here, as I have already hinted, it behooves us to speak with great diffidence and humility, as we are upon ground on which the wisest and best of Christians have been unable to agree.

1. I remark first that the atonement through Christ was effected in part by his *teachings*. It was the tendency of all the religious instruction which he gave to reconcile man to God. He taught us plainly of the Father, and represented his character in the most endearing terms, — in terms the best adapted to awaken

filial love. He always spoke of him as a Father, — as the Father of his hearers, — as the Father of all men. He delighted to point out the numberless manifestations of the divine love. He connected God with every thing bright and beautiful in nature, with the gorgeous hues of the lily, with the flight of the fowls of heaven, with the refreshing shower and the splendor of the noonday sun. He taught the constant presence of this same Father with his human family, and his loving kindness to them. He brought him home to the hearts of his followers as a God hearing prayer, withholding no good gift from those that love him, and more ready at all times to succor and to benefit his children than the tenderest earthly parent. He set forth also in their rich fulness the joys and glories that God has reserved in heaven for his faithful servants. Now these instructions go very far towards bridging over the distance between God and man, — towards making God the object of man's intimate knowledge, heart-felt reverence and fervent love.

2. But words alone could never fully effect the atonement. It was a work, which was much more thoroughly wrought by Christ's *example*. The Saviour manifested throughout his whole life every virtue that can adorn a human character. His purity was unsullied; his benevolence untiring. Where sin had spread its blighting influences, he appeared, not with the sternness of a judge, but with the earnest entreaties and compassionate warnings of a brother. When the storm raged high, when fear sat on every countenance and despair chilled every heart, he stilled the winds and waves, and saved the fainting crew. In the abodes of poverty, by the way side and in the desert, he was a father to the poor. Where sickness laid its victims low, he appeared the messenger of health. Where a father, a widowed mother, a group of affectionate sisters wept over the body or the grave of a daughter, son or brother, there was he to dry their tears and to revive their hopes. Every act in his life was holy and lovely. His is a character which even scoffers can hardly contemplate

without emotion, and which has called forth expressions of respect and admiration from the champions of infidelity. Paint, if you can, moral perfection, — borrow, to add coloring to the sketch, every virtue that saint, sage or prophet ever manifested; the picture is imperfect, cold and dead, compared with the living original in the person of Jesus. Thus in matchless benevolence and celestial purity did the Saviour exhibit himself to human view; yet not as Jesus of Nazareth, but as the image of the invisible God. He sought not honor for himself, but for God. "I and the Father are one," — "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," was his constant language. He thus by his own godlike virtues glorified his heavenly Father, and by the loveliness of his own character won grateful service and fervent love for him that sent him. In him is brought down to the eyes and the sympathies of mortals a familiar image of him, whom mortal eye hath not seen and cannot see, — an image, in the form of tempted and suffering humanity, of him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. Clothed in a body like our own, the perfections of the Deity are the subject, no longer of distant reverence, but of familiar meditation and fraternal love. The glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ with a milder and more inviting radiance, than it does from the heavens, from the expanse of nature or from the written word. Thus mighty is the efficacy of Christ's example in bringing God down to human knowledge, reverence and love, — in reconciling man to God.

3. But in the work of the atonement the scriptures assign a distinct and highly essential agency to the *death* of Christ. "We were reconciled to God by the *death* of his Son." "It pleased the Father, that in him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the *blood of his cross*, by him to reconcile all things unto himself." "Christ also hath once *suffered* for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

The death of Christ was an atoning sacrifice, — offered not to appease an angry Deity, but offered by a gracious Father to re-

concile a guilty world. There is a strong moral power in the sufferings of innocence, especially where it bears the burden of self-devoting love. Nothing else sets forth in so strong contrast the beauty of holiness and the loathsomeness of sin. In the sufferings to which human iniquity subjected the innocent Jesus, God shows most manifestly what evil and bitter consequences may result from the violation of his law. Many of the ways of sin are inviting, many of her pleasures alluring;—in the view of them your principles of duty perhaps grow weak, while passion and appetite gather strength. Look then to the cross of Christ. You there behold one who knew no sin, pierced in his hands and his feet, the subject of the most barbarous contumely, slowly pouring forth his life-blood in the utmost intensity of anguish. And why is this endured? It is sin that nails the Saviour to the cross. It is sin that opens every wound. It is sin that crucifies the Lord of glory. Now, in order to make us heartily loathe sin, we need to have some strong impression made upon our minds of the suffering and wretchedness which sin can produce; and God has therefore set before us in the cross of Christ a most revolting illustration of the height of injustice and barbarity, which human guilt can reach. The entire innocence of the sufferer throws out the guilt of his murderers in the fullest prominence, and excites the strongest feeling of indignation against their sin and against all sin. Who can view the insult and torture heaped by malice on the holy One of Israel, and then go his way in love with sin? Who that views aright the death-scene of Calvary, but must long to crucify all those sins which separate him from his God, and thus to become reconciled to God?

Christ's death has a still farther atoning efficacy, inasmuch as it was a signal display of God's love to man. Every individual sinner might have been justly made to experience in his own person the full penalty of God's violated law. But no. To make the loathsomeness and the evil consequences of sin fully seen and felt was all that was needed; and, in suffering Jesus to fall a

willing victim to human guilt, God has let the angel of retribution pass by the doors of the penitent. To the truly contrite he unsheathes the sword of justice, then points to the bleeding Saviour, bids them feel the odiousness of that sin which made him bleed, and then sheathes the sword, its work undone. Thus, by the sufferings of one, the sufferings of the many are spared; by the death of one, the sins of the many are remitted. And these sufferings, this death, are not the arbitrary infliction of divine power; but the voluntary service rendered by the innocent Jesus, whose prophetic spirit all the while foresees with holy joy the power and the triumphs of his own cross, and hears the thanksgivings of his ransomed family. Now is not this glorious display of mercy adapted to bring home with power to the human soul the parental character of God, to fix upon him the warmest affections of the heart, to make his love the ruling principle of the life, and thus to reconcile man to God?

Christ's death has still farther an atoning efficacy, in its having been the most god-like display of its virtue, the brightest portion of his example. Christ was literally God manifest in the flesh; and never did the divine image shine forth with lustre so pure and heavenly, as when the flesh was undergoing the pangs of dissolution. His perfect holiness appeared the most resplendent, in contrast with the fiend-like forms of sin that cast their dark shadows around the cross. His god-like love put forth its noblest triumphs, when he was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," when his dying eyes sought out from amid the crowd those to whom he could speak comfort, when his dying lips uttered the prayer, "Father, forgive them." Can we survey such love unmoved? Can we fix our eyes upon such holiness, and yet remain the willing slaves of sin? Can we gaze upon this insulted, yet glorious image of the invisible one, without feeling ourselves drawn by the cords of love, without fervently longing to know God more and to serve him better?

No. God in Christ is reconciling the world unto himself. The cross of Christ has been the great instrument of atonement in the hands of his apostles and his ministers. The chosen *twelve* went forth among the stubborn Jews, the self-conceited Greeks and the haughty Romans, and simply preached Christ crucified; and the whole world was moved by their preaching. The Jews trembled for their temple aud their altar; the Ephesians for the image that fell down from heaven. The preaching of the cross goes on, seconded by no human power; and soon the Jewish ritual ceases, — temple after temple is cleared of idols, — Paganism, driven from the cities, finds but a brief abiding place in the remotest villages, and ere long, the moral power of the cross has subdued the mightiest empire that the world ever saw.

Since those early times, it has been only by the preaching of the cross that the church has thrived. Where the cross has been forgotten, even when there have been external indications of prosperity, corruption and spiritual death have lurked within. As the young pelican has been said to nurture itself on the blood of its parent, so does the church derive its vital nutriment from the blood of its Founder. As the apostles and their successors found this true, so have modern missionaries. Some of them have gone among the heathen with subtleties of doctrine, and have found no hearing. Others have sought at the outset to produce a moral reformation; but have found their efforts unavailing. No missionaries have met with uniform or even general success, except the Moravian brethren, and they have trusted solely to the atoning efficacy of the cross of Christ. They have gone into their pagan congregations with the simple story of his sufferings and death, and have told the story as men who felt it; and there has always been something in the narrative, that has touched a tender chord in the rude hearts of the hearers. They have felt that therein was love; and have been subdued by the majesty of that love which was stronger than death. Before this

power, the Hindoos have renounced their prejudices, and the Hottentots have opened their dark minds and their hard hearts to the influences of light and truth. Thus great is the atoning efficacy of the cross of Christ.

I know well that efficacy of a far different kind has been attributed to the Saviour's death. It has been taught and believed that he bore the full penalty due to man's transgression, and thus suffered as a substitute for man. And this vicarious atonement has found support in a few scattered texts of scripture, of which the most striking are these from the *fifty-third* chapter of Isaiah. "Surely he hath *borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.*" "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall *bear their iniquities.*" "*He bare the sin* of many." These passages it would be hard to expound, had we not before us the interpretation of an inspired author. But St. Matthew, as if he anticipated the difficulty that they would occasion in the church, has quoted one of them, and given an exposition of it, which is equally applicable to all the rest, — an exposition, which in the heat of controversy has been strangely overlooked. St. Matthew says: "They brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, *Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.*" In what way did Christ *bear the sicknesses* of those whom he healed? Not surely by becoming sick himself; but he bore them away, — took them away, — lifted them off. On the authority of Matthew then we may attach a similar meaning to this whole class of phrases; and Matthew's authority is certainly to be preferred to that of modern critics. When therefore we are told that Christ *bore the sins* of men, we are to understand the phrase as synonymous with these words of John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God, which *taketh away* the sin of the world!" He bears our sins and takes them away by atoning between us and God, by reconciling us to God, by making us holy.

III. The scripture doctrine of the atonement is an eminently *practical* doctrine. It implies, as we have seen, a moral reconciliation of man to God. It is not enough then that atonement be made once for the sins of the whole world. It must be made over again in the hearts of all its partakers. It must be made in our hearts, if we would become the true children of God and truly fit for heaven. We must personally *receive the atonement.* We must become personally reconciled to God by knowledge, penitence, faith and obedience. We must *receive the atonement through Christ Jesus,* — must look to him as our Teacher, Guide and Saviour, — as the Way to God and the Image of God. To apply this atonement to the hearts of individuals is the province of Christian ordinances and of the Christian ministry.

My brother, you are now about to be set apart for the ministry of the atonement by the laying on of hands and prayer. It is not the motives of a worldly policy or of a refined philosophy, it is not the terrors of Sinai or the opiative creed of self-righteousness, but Jesus Christ and him crucified, that you are to preach. Lead not your hearers to honor the Son at the expense of the Father, — to love the Son and dread the Father. Bid them not to flee to Jesus as a refuge from the wrath of the Almighty. Remember what he said while he was yet on earth, "I and the Father are one." Study then with intense and prayerful zeal, set forth with untiring constancy and fidelity the lovely features of the Saviour's character; and bid your hearers "see God in all and all in God." Make them honor the Father through the Son. Reconcile them to the Father, by attributing to him all that is condescending, gentle, meek, forgiving and merciful in the Son who is his image. It is only by the preaching of Christ and of the atonement through him, that you are to lead sinners home to God, and to speed saints on their heavenward progress.

May God be with you in the high and holy enterprize in which you have embarked. May he grant you a spirit of entire recon-

ciliation to his providence and his will, and thus furnish you with the best of all preparations for the work of reconciling others. May he give you a long, a useful and a happy ministry. May the blessing of sinners reclaimed by your exhortations, of mourners comforted by your sympathy, of dying saints sustained by your prayers, — may their blessing and the blessing of their Saviour and their God rest upon you. And in that life to come, where every faithful servant will see the fruit of his labors, may you enjoy forever the society of many souls, whom you shall have nurtured for glory, honor and immortality.

Brethren of this church and society, we congratulate you on the ministry this day constituted, trusting that it will prove to many, would to God that it might to all of you, a ministry of reconciliation. You have made efforts and sacrifices, in order to enjoy the preaching of the gospel in what you and we regard as its primitive purity. Think not that you have now done enough. Acquiesce not in the idea that your minister will take the concerns of religion off of your hands. He cannot bear for you the trials of life. He cannot occupy in your place the bed of sickness. He cannot appear in your stead at the judgment seat of Christ. At that tribunal you must each of you stand, either with a spirit reconciled to God, or with a soul alienated from him by sin. Are you prepared, my friends, for that day? Are you reconciled to God? Does his character appear to you altogether lovely? Can you regard all his dealings as just and merciful? Do his promises speak peace and comfort to your souls? If so, you may well "joy in God, through your Lord Jesus Christ, through whom you have now received the atonement."

But are there any of you, whose lives are not yet influenced, whose hearts are not yet sanctified, by Christian principle? Let then the institution of new means of grace awaken you to a new sense of your spiritual wants and dangers. Put not off attention to these things to the hour, when you will need God's reconciled countenance to sustain your departing spirits. Now, before

the evil days come, before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, "receive the atonement through our Lord Jesus Christ." Come to him, penitent and humble. Come with faith and with love. Come, that you may obtain clear views of God's character, that you may have your hearts penetrated by a sense of his paternal goodness, that you may become entirely reconciled to his providence and his will. Thus coming, Jesus will receive you, and will show you the Father.

May God through your preacher's voice send home with power to your hearts the atoning efficacy of the teachings, sufferings and death of Christ; and may many souls among you, ages upon ages hence, look back upon the solemnities of this day with joy and gratitude.

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